



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

July 2, 2020

Dear Interested Party:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for public review regarding a proposal to construct a primitive boat ramp at the FWP Little Muddy Creek Fishing Access Site. The primitive ramp is proposed to be developed into the lower portion of Little Muddy Creek and would allow for the launching and retrieval of small boats for access to the Missouri River. The shallow nature of Little Muddy Creek during most times of the year will limit the use of this ramp to small watercraft, such as rafts, drift boats, canoes, and kayaks.

Additional copies of the draft EA are available at Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Great Falls or the draft EA is also available on the FWP website at <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/>. A public review and comment period will be available July 2 – August 8, 2020. Written comment should be delivered to the following address:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
R-4 Fisheries
Little Muddy Creek FAS Boat Ramp Comments
4600 Giant Springs Rd Great Falls, MT 59405

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 Supervisor
Great Falls, MT 59405
gbertellotti@mt.gov
(406) 454-5840

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 E. 6th Ave, P.O. Box 200701 Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406)444-2452

Environmental Assessment Checklist

Part 1. Proposed Action Description

Project Title: FWP – Little Muddy Creek FAS Boat Ramp

Date: 5/21/20

Name, Address and Phone Number:

Applicant:

FWP – Vicki Robinson
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

EA Completed by:

Jason Mullen
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Project Location: Approximately 6 miles northeast of Cascade, MT

Description of Project:

Develop a primitive boat ramp into lower Little Muddy Creek at the Little Muddy Creek Fishing Access to allow for the launching and retrieval of small boats for access to the Missouri River (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Development of a boat ramp into lower Little Muddy Creek will allow boat anglers access to the Missouri River at most flows by walking their boats approximately 400 ft between the boat ramp on Little Muddy Creek and the Missouri River. The shallow nature of Little Muddy Creek during most times of the year will limit the use of this ramp to small watercraft, such as rafts, drift boats, canoes, and kayaks. It is possible this boat ramp may only provide seasonal use in some years if Little Muddy Creek becomes too low to allow for transport between the ramp and the Missouri River. This would likely occur only during the low flow periods of dry years. Site reconnaissance in July 2019, August 2019, April 2020, and other times, found the site suitable for use. A ramp directly into the Missouri River was deemed not feasible at this site, due to the extensive flooding that occurs downgradient of the proposed location. Access to the ramp may need to be restricted at times through a gate or signage if flooding preclude access.

It is expected the use of the proposed boat ramp will be less than that of other nearby locations based on site conditions (e.g., flooding or lack of water) and the requirement that boats be

transported through shallow, muddy water to and from the Missouri River. However, a boat ramp at this site will provide additional boat floating opportunities downstream of Cascade by providing a boat launch option approximately 8.7 river miles downstream of Cascade. Current access at the Little Muddy Creek FAS is limited to walk-in access or launching or retrieval of small water craft, such as canoes or kayaks, that would have to be carried a considerable distance to the existing parking area (approximately 800 ft from the river to parking area). The next public access point downstream of Little Muddy Creek is Dune FAS, which is approximately 19.6 river miles downstream of Cascade and 10.9 river miles downstream of Little Muddy Creek FAS. This site allows for the hand launch of small watercraft such as canoes and kayaks but restricts the use of watercraft on trailers. The next public access point with a boat ramp for the launching of boats with trailers is located at the Ulm FAS, which is approximately 23.5 river miles downstream of Cascade and 14.8 river miles downstream of Little Muddy Creek FAS.

The Missouri River downstream of Holter Dam is one of the most heavily fished waterbodies in the state. Based on biennial angler surveys conducted by FWP it was estimated the Missouri River had 170,736 angler days in 2017, ranking second-most in the state, behind only the Madison River. Improving access to the river downstream of Cascade will provide additional angling opportunities for the public and has been suggested as an area for improved access by Montana Trout Unlimited (<http://map.montanatru.org/>) and other members of the public during public meetings with the area fisheries biologist.

Construction activities consist of sloping the bank of Little Muddy Creek to provide an appropriate slope for a boat ramp. Fill that is removed during the bank sloping process will be spoiled outside the floodplain to prevent mobilization back into Muddy Creek or the Missouri River. The lower bank is devoid of vegetation, and the upper bank is near vertical with vegetation on top. The sloping of the upper bank will consist of an area approximately 15 ft wide (width of the boat ramp) by 10 ft long (length of upper bank with vegetation). Approximately 3.5 cubic yards of gravel (15 ft wide x 25 ft long x .25 ft deep) will be placed on the sloped bank and compacted to provide a suitable surface to load and unload boats. The current fencing that exists along the top of bank will be removed and replaced with a cattle guard, a spring-loaded gate or some other means to exclude livestock. Care will be taken not to disturb any adjacent vegetation, but any disturbed ground adjacent to the boat ramp will be reclaimed using a native seed mix. The large cottonwood next to the proposed boat ramp would be left unharmed.

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

NA

Part 2 Environmental Review

Table 1. Potential impact on physical environment.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially significant	Minor	None	Can Be mitigated	Comments provided
1. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources				x		
2. Terrestrial or aquatic life and /or habitats			x			2.
3. Introduction of new species into an area				x		
4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.			x			4.
5. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			x			5.
6. Existing water right or reservation.				x		
7. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				x		
8. Air quality or objectionable odors			x			8.
9. Historic and archaeological sites				x		
10. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air and energy				x		
11. Aesthetics			x			11.

Comments

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided.)

2. A small amount of riparian habitat would be disturbed by constructing the boat ramp. The bank is already disturbed due to past livestock use, thus disturbance would be largely limited to the intact vegetation along the top of bank, including an area approximately 15 ft wide (width of boat ramp) by 10 ft long (length of bank with intact vegetation). Due to the already disturbed nature of the bank and the small amount of disturbance required for the boat ramp, the disturbance to riparian habitat would be minor.

4. Vegetative cover will be reduced along the top of bank through the sloping process. Only a small amount of vegetation exists along the top of bank, thus the amount of vegetative cover that will be reduced is minor.

5. The project will have a minor short-term impact on water quality as a small amount of sediment will be mobilized increasing turbidity. The excess fill that is removed from sloping will be spoiled outside the floodplain. The mobilized sediment during construction will settle out quickly and within Little Muddy Creek. The addition of gravel to the bank for a boat ramp will minimize the amount of sediment that is mobilized into Little Muddy Creek compared to the existing bare bank. Any sediment that is mobilized by the action of launching boats in Little

Muddy Creek will settle out in Muddy Creek, which consists of a fine sediment bottom naturally. Thus, any actions of construction the boat launch or launching boats will be localized and not influence long-term water quality, quantity or distribution.

8. Minor short-term impacts may occur during construction, due to the operation of equipment. These would be short-term in duration and cease upon the completion of construction activities.

11. There will be some short-term minor impact to the aesthetics at this site due to the presence of construction equipment. In the short term, the site will have aspects characteristic of a construction site. These impacts will cease when the construction activities are completed, which should be on the order of a few days. Upon completion a small gravel boat ramp will be present where an eroding, muddy bank currently exists.

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially significant	Minor	None	Can Be mitigated	Comments provided
1. Social structures and cultural diversity				x		
2. Changes in existing public benefits provided by wildlife populations and/or habitat				x		
3. Local and state tax base and tax revenue				x		
4. Agricultural production				x		
5. Human health				x		
6. Quantity and distribution of community and personal income				x		
7. Access to and quality of recreational activities		x				7.
8. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals (ordinances)				x		
9. Distribution and density of population and housing				x		
10. Demands for government services				x		
11. Industrial and/or commercial activity				x		

Comments

(A description of potentially significant, or unknown, impacts and potential alternatives for mitigation must be provided as comments.)

7. The project will enhance access to the Missouri River by improving boat access to river downstream of Cascade, MT.

Does the proposed action involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely harmful if they were to occur?

No. The project increases boat access to the Missouri River, providing an additional boat access point between Cascade and Ulm. There is little risk of major impacts to humans, the environment or fish and wildlife.

Does the proposed action have impacts that are individually minor, but cumulatively significant or potentially significant?

No. The proposed action is localized.

Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action when alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider. Include a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

No Action – This action would result in the status quo, which provides limited access opportunities at this site as described above. This action would not result in improved accessibility of the river downstream of Cascade for recreational floaters. This action conflicts with the mission of FWP to provide access to the public and thus was not selected.

Alternative 1 – Construction of a boat ramp directly into the Missouri River at this site was considered but was deemed not feasible due to the frequency with which flooding occurs down gradient of the proposed site.

Preferred Alternative – The preferred alternative is to construct a primitive boat ramp to allow for the launch of small boats (e.g., drift boats, rafts, canoes, and kayaks) into lower Little Muddy Creek to allow access to and from the Missouri River. This alternative would increase boating opportunities on the Missouri River downstream of Cascade. It is expected the use of the proposed boat ramp will be less than that of other nearby locations based on site conditions (e.g., flooding or lack of water) and the requirement that boats be transported through shallow, muddy water to and from the Missouri River.

Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

FWP will complete a Joint Application and submit to appropriate permitting agencies.

Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS and public comment:

Due to the limited scope and anticipated impacts from the proposed project, an Environmental Assessment is appropriate for the project.

This project is being proposed at a Montana FWP FAS located on DNRC property. Due to part of the project being completed on public land, and the nature of the FAS will be altered to allow some limited boat access, it was determined that a public comment period is necessary.

This EA will be posted on the MFWP internet site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices>) and mailed directly to interested persons. Any interested citizen is encouraged to contact MFWP and the preparer of this EA to discuss the proposal or to provide comments.

Duration of the comment period:

The comment period is 30 days. Public comment will be accepted through **8/08/2020 at 5:00 PM.**

Upon completion of the comment period all comments will be reviewed, and a decision notice will be issued by the MFWP Region 4, Regional Supervisor.

Name, title, address, and telephone number of the Person Responsible for Preparing the EA.

Vicki Robinson
Fishing Access Site Program Manager
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5854
Vrobinson@mt.gov

Date Prepared: July 2, 2020

Submit written comments to:	Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
	R-4 Fisheries
	Little Muddy Creek FAS
	Boat Ramp Comments
	4600 Giant Springs Rd
	Great Falls, MT 59405



Figure 1. Aerial of Little Muddy Creek FAS in relation to Cascade, MT. The red dot depicts the public boat launch in Cascade. Wing Dam FAS provides walk-in access only.

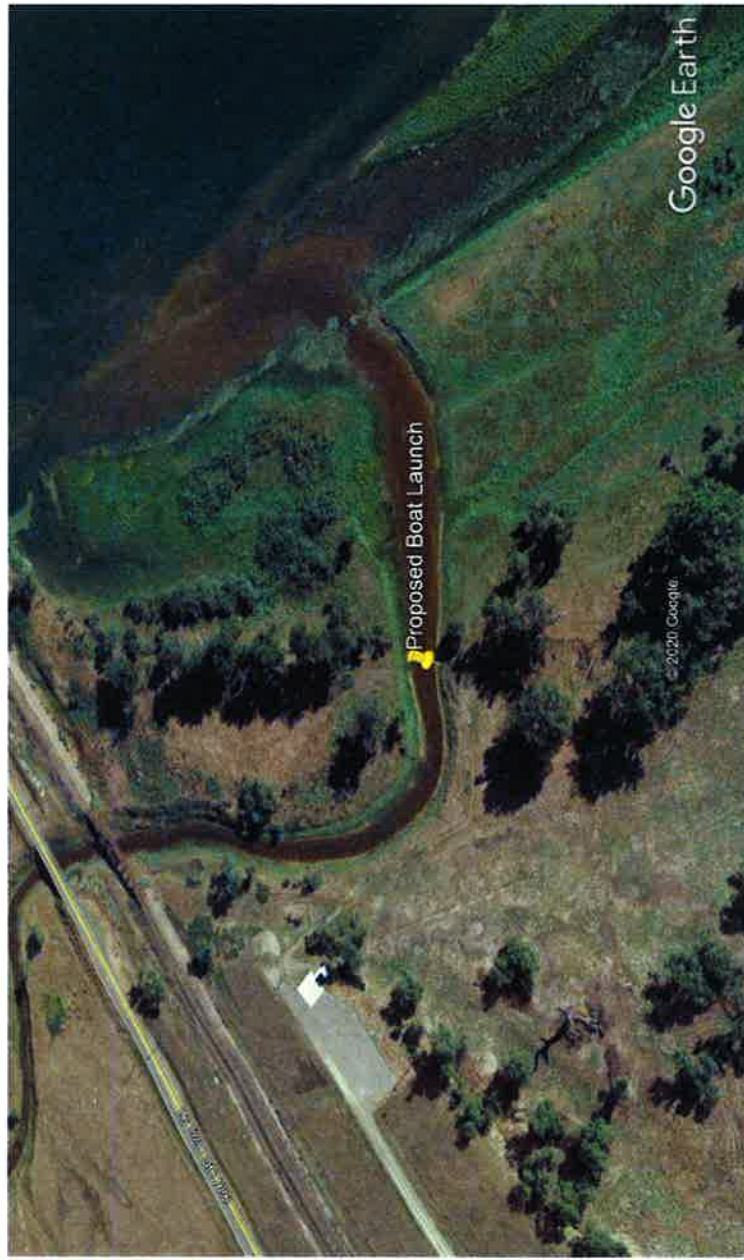


Figure 2. Aerial of project area depicting the proposed boat launch at Little Muddy Creek FAS in relation to the existing parking area and the Missouri River.



Photo 1. Little Muddy Creek FAS. Looking east toward the Missouri River. Proposed boat launch would be located upstream of cottonwood along bank of Little Muddy Creek. July 2019.



Photo 2. Little Muddy Creek FAS. Looking west toward the existing parking area. April 2020.



Photo 3. Little Muddy Creek FAS. Proposed boat launch would enter Little Muddy Creek immediately behind the location where the FWP employee is standing, upstream of walk-through gate and cottonwood. Note bank is already largely exposed from past livestock use. April 2020.



Photo 4. Little Muddy Creek FAS. Close-up view of existing bank (depicting mostly top of bank) where proposed boat launch would be constructed. July 2019.